

## Questions and Answers about Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools

### What type of infections does MRSA cause?

- In the community most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men).
- Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA skin infections.

### How is MRSA transmitted?

- MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).

### In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?

- MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere.
- Some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted.
- These factors, referred to as the 5 C's, are as follows:
  - Crowding,
  - frequent skin-to-skin contact,
  - Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions),
  - Contaminated items and surfaces,
  - and lack of Cleanliness.
- Locations where the 5 C's are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

### How do I protect myself from getting MRSA?

- You can protect yourself by:
  - practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in exercise);
  - covering skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed;

- avoiding sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin; and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches;
- maintaining a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin.

### Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?

- The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.

### Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?

- Covering infections will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA.
  - In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur.
  - MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.
  - When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.
  - Cleaning surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants is effective at removing MRSA from the environment.
    - It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.
    - Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.
    - The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA: <http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

